Society of American Archivists
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Annual Meeting Task Force Report
(Prepared by: AMTF Co-Chairs Kathy Marquis and Fynnette Eaton)

The Annual Meeting Task Force is charged with "analyzing current practices related to the SAA Annual Meeting as well as possible future approaches." Thus far we have focused on internal information gathering: What SAA has already explored, such as virtual conferencing, what has been tried and suggested in the past, the financial realities of Annual Meeting income and expenses, and what data are available on meeting attendance.

Going forward, we anticipate examining the results of the recent member survey and continuing to investigate alternative meeting models, content delivery methods including online options, contract language, and community service projects.

Meetings We've Had

Kathy Marquis and Fynnette Eaton met with Nancy Beaumont, Brian Doyle, and René Mueller in Chicago in November 2011. Discussion centered on SAA's finances, the cost of the aAnnual Meeting, the history of Annual Meeting changes (structure, timing, online access, cost), and anticipated support from SAA staff. The purpose was to determine what was already being investigated (virtual conferencing), what data already existed, and how we could best work with the SAA office. In other words, no wheel reinvention! We were also given the opportunity to suggest a couple of questions for the survey that dealt directly with the Annual Meeting. Members of the various subgroups responded immediately and offered possible questions.

The full nine-member task force, including subcommittee chairs, met with Nancy, René, and Christopher Wehking (Director of Meetings and Exhibits at the American Society of Anesthesiology), who is assisting the task force on a *pro bono* basis. We focused on establishing the direction for the work of the task force and spent time determining what aspects of the Annual Meeting should be reviewed. We've lost some momentum as we wait for background information, but the enthusiasm of the members is high.

Informal meetings were held at spring regionals: MARAC (Fynnette, Jodi Koste, and Ben Primer) and MAC (Kathy, Jennifer Johnson, Rachel Vagts, Shari Christy, and Rebecca Bizonet).

General Impressions

Member cost of the Annual Meeting is a top priority. It seems clear that this was an original impetus behind the establishment of this task force. It remains a major focus. At the same time, Nancy Beaumont reminds us that concerns about these costs are as old as the organization itself. What has changed is more likely the ability of members to voice their concerns in public forums and communicate with each other about this.

Few members understand the realities of Annual Meeting costs. Task force members feel SAA needs to be more obvious about publicizing information about SAA staff and member labor and other costs of putting on the Annual Meeting. Nancy's 2010 *Archival Outlook* column (http://files.archivists.org/periodicals/Archival-Outlook/Back-Issues/2010-1-AO.pdf) needs to be repeated / updated. Jackie Dooley has offered to focus a Presidential column on this, as well. The best example is the issue of Wi-Fi at the Annual Meeting. One hotel, newly built, offers WiFi throughout at no charge because the building was constructed to allow this. Another (older) hotel quotes $250,000 for hotel-wide Wi-Fi. Just because wireless access is available in every café that we visit doesn't mean it can be available in hotels with which we negotiated contracts five years ago. Once people hear actual costs, their level of understanding of these challenges skyrockets.

Networking opportunities are highest on many members' list of meeting benefits, not the educational sessions. A friend's Facebook post the other day captured this well: "Well, it has been a good meeting. Got to see lots of people that I rarely see, went to some thought provoking sessions (although my personal takeaway was not always the subject of the session), and I will come away with some new resolve to do better and change the culture at my [institution.]" How do we capitalize on that, promote such a meeting effectively, and provide backup to members needing to justify attending a meeting strong on interactive sessions and less focused on papers and lectures? A comment to our blog noted, "It was hard to ask for time off to go eat cookies with my friends." However, conversations with archival managers show that many do understand that building professional networks is a valued – and fundable – aspect of conference attendance.

Challenges Thus Far

As yet, we don't have a list of comparable organizations, which our SAA consultant offered to provide. This has hampered our investigations, as we don't want to have task force members gathering information on techniques used by organizations that are not comparable to ours in size and funding. For example, many SAA members are also ALA members and see the virtual conferencing, webinars, keynote speakers, and other offerings which ALA offers. They wonder why SAA can't provide these same things, but often the answer is not lack of interest, but lack of the funding and membership levels that ALA enjoys. We don't want to waste the time of our members, or other organizations' staff, if the meeting option being looked at is only possible because the

other organization (or its members) has better funding, larger numbers, doesn't have the same educational focus, etc.

Attempts to get <u>feedback from members</u>: The task force's "blog" on the SAA microsite has not functioned as a real blog because of lack of RSS feed capability. We understand that SAA staff is investigating the cost of an upgrade to the Drupal website. Without RSS capability, members must seek out any new posts or comments, rather than being notified of these features in their personal feed. This automatic updating is simply the reality of how blog reading is done. Without it, we are essentially daring members to find our posts and give us their feedback. Most are not doing this, despite a generous amount of publicity in *In the Loop*.

We are waiting for <u>data from the recent member survey</u>, particularly on costs, Wi-Fi, and social responsibility. We are grateful to have been able to contribute to the survey questions; now we can't wait to see the responses! The Social Responsibility Subcommittee is also waiting for additional SAA contract language information so that they can compare this to other language they discover.

Getting Feedback / Interactions from Members

We have just gotten the go-ahead for a <u>task force Facebook page</u> and will implement that shortly. In the near future, we will plan an article in *Archival Outlook* as well.

<u>SAA microsite "blog</u>." In February we began posting "blog" entries (considered news items by the microsite) on our SAA microsite (http://www2.archivists.org/groups/annual-meeting-task-force) asking members for their feedback on Annual Meeting issues such as financial support for meeting attendance and experience with more interactive meeting methods. We have been getting a handful of comments, but have been hampered by the lack of RSS functionality on the microsite.

Shoutouts from bloggers like Kate Theimer (ArchivesNext) and Terry Baxter (Beaver Archivist) have been helpful in publicizing the work of the task force and the availability of new posts on the AMTF microsite. Task force members have also tweeted about the blog, and we have a Twitter hashtag: #amtfsaa. SAA has also given us lots of great mentions and links in *In the Loop*.

Feedback from Four Subcommittees

Social Responsibility Subgroup (Rachel Vagts, Chair)

Holding conference calls, and posting documents to the task force microsite, the subgroup has focused on two elements:

- Looking at contract language to determine the level of social responsibility that SAA can require from conference venues

- Looking at other local factors and activities that may demonstrate SAA's level of social responsibility and commitment:
  - Organizing and offering a service project experience for conference attendees.
  - SAA's Archivists of Religious Collections Section is sponsoring a service project at the San Diego Food Bank at this year's Annual Meeting. We plan to follow up with the section to see how the event worked and hope to plan a similar event in New Orleans in 2013.

- Looking at working with hotel vendors to find sustainable and socially responsible ways to reduce food and material waste, including donating surplus food to local feeding programs.

- The subgroup is awaiting the report of the Membership survey and additional information on both SAA and other professional organizations' contract language.

Meeting Content Subgroup (Ben Primer, chair)

They have communicated by email and conference call. Major points discussed were:

- Networking is often the main value of the meeting.
- We need to investigate alternative methods of delivering content since scheduling has gotten to be such a headache and is rapidly lengthening the meeting.
- Section and roundtable meetings, because content is focused on a specific topic, are sometimes the most rewarding parts of the meeting. Examples from subcommittee experience are the Business Archives Colloquium, the Congressional Papers Roundtable, and the Lesbian and Gay Archives Roundtable. Use these as models for other SAA groups?
- Fewer plenaries: Delighted to see this already acted on by the Council!
- Greater focus on collaborations/presentations by non-archivists. Attendees appreciate the different perspective on our work (ex: historians and those with technical expertise).
- Presentations on strategies and practices that others can implement at their institutions are very helpful – valuable "take home" information.

The SAA staff has provided a significant amount of information about session topics, number of attendees in sessions and plenaries, and registration numbers by category.

Online Accessibility Subgroup (Lisa Carter, Chair)

The group has been communicating mostly over email and the task force's Wiggio account and had a conference call with Nancy Beaumont in March regarding virtual conferencing options that SAA is exploring.

Nancy provided us with her research on virtual conferencing vendors; subcommittee members have contacted them to learn more about offerings and cost. The options are

numerous and varied. We began an environmental scan of the options out there and placed our assessments in a spreadsheet that we are still adding to.

We have reviewed the final report of the SAA Communications Technology Working Group and are aware of the recommendations of that group.

We are investigating:
- What options are out there for online conference offerings?
- Environmental scan (still consolidating).
- How can we deliver meeting content asynchronously online?
- Investigate option to put past meeting content online.
- Figure out what is already happening online and determine how/if to coordinate.
- How can SAA harness the blogging, tweeting, posting of presentations already going on?

Meeting Model Subgroup (Lynn Eaton, Chair)

The Meeting Model subcommittee has communicated via conference call and created action items that are due in May:

- Creating a list of organizations to contact.
- Creating a list of questions to ask organizations.

We will meet again (conference call) soon to divvy up the organizations and begin contacting them for information.

We are interested in getting a list of national organizations from the Association Executives group Nancy belongs to – not a list broken down by size but just a list. We are trying to get a hold on a solid number of organizations to contact and that would help us to have a rather comprehensive list of organizations to research into their size, etc., and then create a master list of likely contactable organizations from that research.

Low-Hanging Fruit: Ideas SAA Could Implement in the Near Future at Low Cost

- Online accessibility: Investigating low-cost options like Twitter and FB, blogging at the meeting, possibly bringing them under SAA umbrella; listing them on annual meeting site and possibly; loading content of session CDs from previous years so members can access it (cost assessment not done for this yet).
- Social responsibility: Community service project at the Annual Meeting. Participating in one already planned in San Diego; considering recommending this as annual "give back" project for Annual Meeting.
- Setting aside a room for individuals to meet to discuss possible projects on an *ad hoc* basis
- We were pleased to see that the Council has already taken action in areas such as eliminating the third plenary.
- Trying out interactive meeting ideas in our task force forum in San Diego.

Examples of Ideas the Task Force Is Exploring

- Conference centers vs. one hotel. Would this be a way of moving to some of the cities that we have not been able to consider in the past?
- Future community service projects, including working with local small archives (an "appraisal-a-thon"?).
- Vendor sponsorship for hotel-wide Wi-Fi or other online access options.
- Webinars and other online methods for content communication, especially for sections, committees, and roundtables, leaving face-to-face meetings for interaction and networking.

Plans for the SAA Meeting in San Diego

- We will hold an open forum on Thursday. <u>The plan is to conduct an interactive/World Café discussion on a set group of topics – not just a briefing by task force staff.</u> The "briefing" will be, instead, an advance overview on our blog, plus handouts in the room, so that we don't spend time at the meeting going over what we've done so far. We anticipate receiving good suggestions from the participants.
- <u>We have been given a table in the registration area and a slot during Office Hours in the Exhibit Hall, to be staffed by task force members.</u> We will be there, and visible, available for conversations, suggestions, and questions. We will also plan to live tweet while we're there (if possible), post questions for people to answer, and accept feedback in person and virtually.
- <u>Task force members (as many as are able) will participate in the food bank community service project planned for the San Diego meeting.</u> This will help us decide whether or not to recommend that a community service project be a regular meeting feature as part of our efforts towards social responsibility. Other suggestions will also be considered.